

January 9, 2022

Honorable Judge Edgar Ramos,

It is my wish that this humble letter finds you and your family well and healthy. My name is Maria Palacio, I am David Pike's wife and mother of our two sons -David Jr and Joshua.

For almost three years now, our family has navigated circumstances and moments we thought that only happened to others or in the movies. We managed to maintain our senses, our faith and structure for the sake of our sons and love for one another.

Looking back since my husband and I became a family more than 20 years ago, I see the many tests we have faced through the years, including the daunting day when the Autism diagnosis entered our lives with our firstborn son David Jr. All through these 20 years, my husband David has been an impeccable and dedicated father, loyal husband, hard worker, autism advocate and cheerleader for our family. He is the best guy for this job – truly an amazing human being. In 2009, David left his career in computers to help our family found a center and school for children with autism to provide the best interventions under one roof. He created the systems and backend for our center while running the operations and taking an active and integral role on the Board of the University of Miami Center for Autism (UMCARD). My husband's life has been one of a true family man. This one transgression is the only stain on an otherwise clean, and honest character. And even this transgression was one he participated in by taking a job he thought would help our family. My husband has no financial background but didn't push back as he should have when the financial law expert owner of the company said that all the actions were legal and business appropriate. He is deeply sorry for having participated in what he knew was a deception and he lives with the knowledge that instead of helping us as he tried to do, his conduct has put our family in a very difficult place.

This year has already begun with extreme pain, with the unexpected loss of my father on January 23. Family is our backbone and as we gathered in Puerto Rico for his burial, waves of sorrow and imminent separation began to feel like a second skin. As we mourn our loss, we also worry about the impact it is having on our boys, and especially on David Jr (19). For David things are different. The need for structure, dependability and family ties is his lifeline. A constant question from our son is "Where is?" He asks, Where is dad? Where is Joshua? What time he getting home? He becomes unsure and agitated at relatively minor deviations to routine, unable to perform otherwise normal functions. I fear that larger changes to his routine, the fear of not understanding abstract concepts and the anxiety of not knowing what's next will bring a chain reaction that will deeply affect his self-esteem, sense of being, and security. Loss is a concept that is hard for us to explain and even harder for him to understand.

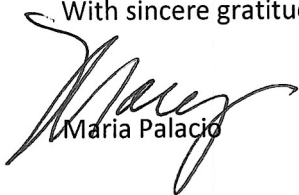
It has been profoundly hard seeing our son's anxiety escalate with the loss of his Abu, the face of agony reflected as he tries to understand a new feeling of what emotional pain means. This year will also bring another separation and transition. Our youngest one (Joshua 17) will be going away to college. David Jr. will also be transitioning out of the school setting into a new and not-yet-found alternative. While this might seem like a normal flow in any household with teens, for us it is not. For David, Jr., the absence of his brother at the same time he leaves the structure of his own school will be a major challenge.

My heart sinks thinking how catastrophic it could be if he also experiences not having his dad in addition to not having his brother nearby. My husband and I have worked hard, hand in hand, to help David, Jr (as well as others) be the best he can be. Every year we see new rays of progress, and we know it is the constant engagement, attention to detail and predicting his needs even before his brain struggles to find the words to communicate them. It can be exhausting. When David Jr. is not in school, my husband engages him daily. When they are not cooking together, our son will ask him to 'play card game', scrabble, paint, play volleyball in the pool or ping pong. This Christmas new games arrived under the tree, all products of my husband's on-going search for how to engage our son. My husband David is not only David Jr.'s dad, but he is also his only friend. As you probably know, friendships are almost nonexistent for persons with Autism. Just recently, we had a meeting with Best Buddies in search for a "friend" for our son. My husband was integral part of this meeting, detailing our son's likes and dislikes. The more our son develops the more I realize how alike they both are.

The lack of alternatives for David Jr. as he finishes his last year in high school and begins the transition to adulthood is bleak, already making us rethink strategies to create new opportunities for him and in the community in general, to include young adults in the spectrum as productive members of our local society. We are in the early stages of a dramatic upgrade to our 501(c)(3) school and therapy center and exploring the opportunity to launch a second "Crystal Academy" in the Orlando area. My husband and I work every day on these goals. We understand that this is a huge undertaking that needs experience, dedication, and passion. The absence of commitment we are now experiencing in the workforce is hurting the intervention opportunities and services for this vulnerable population. Losing David's daily commitment to these goals would be devastating to our son, and many like him.

It is my prayer and plea to you will take into consideration my husband's near impeccable life, dedication to his family, and deep regret for his role in withholding of information from the banks five years ago and grant him the opportunity to stay with us and continue his remarkable work with our son and the Autism community.

With sincere gratitude,



Maria Palacio